

THE HISTORICAL CYCLE OF THE DEGENERATION OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL (II)

1914 - Bankruptcy of the 2nd International

The 2nd International had declared in the **Basel Manifesto** that it would respond to the outbreak of the imperialist world war with calling a revolutionary strike and the use of arms against each one's 'own bourgeoisie.

But at the moment of truth, in July 1914, **the 2nd International went bankrupt**: each social democratic party aligned itself with its own bourgeoisie, voted for war credits, and theorized and put into practice the **defense of their own country, betraying socialism**. Only the Bolshevik Party, the Italian Socialist Party, and the Serbian Socialist Party remained outside the interventionist whirlwind.

Everyone else found the appropriate alibi: the French had to defend democratic France against the central empires, the Germans had to defend Germany from the even more backward Russia, an ally of France.

Under the guise of **improvisation**, social chauvinism rediscovered supposed values (*civilization, democracy, progress*) that were above class struggle and compelled the defense of their own bourgeoisie. Under the umbrella of *party discipline*, this betrayal was even imposed on the revolutionary minority within these large social democratic parties. A tragic example of this form of *discipline for the sake of discipline* was the vote for

war credits by K. Liebknecht, before going out to the streets to call on the working class to rise against the war and for revolutionary defeatism.

Lenin definitively dismantled all these **social chauvinistic sophisms** and precisely formulated the slogan of **revolutionary defeatism**, among other texts, in "Socialism and War" (1915) and in "The Military Programme of Proletarian Revolution" (1916).

In Italy, the left of the PSI (Italian Socialist Party) took completely solidary positions with the Bolsheviks, among other texts, in "Socialism of Yesterday in the Face of Today's War" (1914), opposing Mussolini's interventionism and the bourgeois neutrality of the direction. The positions of Marxism were restored for the whole cycle of the anti-capitalist proletarian revolution: *"Whoever refers today to Marx's attitude towards the wars of the epoch of the progressive bourgeoisie and forgets Marx's statement that **"the workers have no fatherland," a statement that applies precisely to the epoch of the reactionary, obsolete bourgeoisie, to the epoch of the socialist revolution, shamelessly distorts Marx and substitutes the bourgeois for the socialist point of view. (...)***

Opportunism and social-chauvinism have the same ideological-political content: collaboration of classes instead of

- July 1914 – Start of World War I (bankruptcy of the II International)
- 1917 – February and October revolution in Russia
- 1917 – foreign military intervention and civil war in Russia
- March 1918 – Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
- November 1918 - Kiel mutiny
- November 1918 – End of World War I
- December 1918 – Foundation of the Communist Party of Germany
- January 1919 – Assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht by the social democracy
- March 1919 – 1st Congress of the 3rd International
- March-August 1919 – Hungarian Soviet Republic (participation of social democrats dynamite it)
- April 1919 – Soviet Republic of Bavaria
- March-April 1920 – Kapp/Lüttwitz "putsch" + Ruhr uprising
- May 1920 - *Theses of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction of the PSI*
- July-August 1920 - II Congress of the 3rd International → "21 conditions of admission" (in particular, the 21st)
- August 1920 – Defeat of the red army in Warsaw
- September 1920 – Occupation of factories in Italy
- December 1920 – Fusion of the 'left' of the USPD with the KPD
- January 1921 – Foundation of the Communist Party of Italy
- January 1921 – 'Open letter' from KPD to SPD and trade unions
- March 1921 – Failure of the March action in Germany
- June-July 1921 – III Congress of the 3rd International → **"conquest of the masses"** (of the majority...).
- December 1921 – Resolution previous to the 1st Enlarged Executive → **"political united front"**
- January 1922 – *Theses on the tactics of the Communist Party of Italy (Rome)*
- February 1922 – 1st Enlarged Executive
- April 1922 – Joint conference with the II International and the 1/2 International
- June 1922 – 2nd Enlarged Executive → **"workers' government"**.

- August 1922 – Submission of the CCP to the Kuomintang.
- October 1922 – March on Rome
- November 1922 – *Project of Thesis presented by the CP of Italy to the IV Congress*
- November-December 1922 – IV Congress of the 3rd International → **"workers and peasants government"**
- January 1923 – French occupation of the Ruhr
- February 1923 – Arrest of the leaders of the CP of Italy, handpicking of Togliatti for the direction.
- June 1923 – "National bolshevism" in Germany
- October 1923 – Communist ministers in the governments of Saxony and Thuringia (and ulterior military dissolution)
- January 1924 – Death of Lenin
- June-July 1924 – V Congress of the 3rd International → **"bolshevization"**
- June 1924 – assassination of Matteotti and Aventine pantomime
- April 1925 – Hindenburg's presidential election in Germany
- January 1926 – *Theses of the Left to the III Congress of the Communist Party of Italy (Lyon)*
- February 1926 – VI Enlarged Executive
- March 1926 – Betrayal of the proletarian revolution in China (massacre of Shanghai and Canton in 1927)
- May 1926 – Betrayal of the miners' strike in Great Britain (Anglo-Russian Committee)
- December 1926 – VII Enlarged Executive → **"socialism in one country"**, defeat of the Russian opposition
- October 1929 – Crack of 29
- 1936-1938 – Moscow processes
- May 1937 – May events during the Spanish civil war
- September 1939 – Start of the 2nd Imperialist World War II
- May 1943 – Formal dissolution of the 3rd International



The **complete timeline**, with the explanation of each event, can be consulted interactively on the **installable web app** by accessing through the QR code.

class struggle, renunciation of revolutionary methods of struggle, helping one's "own" government in its embarrassed situation instead of taking advantage of these embarrassments for revolution." (Lenin, Socialism and war, 1915).

"Only by cursing all war and everything military, only be demanding disarmament? The women of an oppressed and really revolutionary class will never accept that shameful role. They will say to their sons: "You will soon be grown up. You will be given a gun. Take it and learn the military art properly. The proletarians need this knowledge not to shoot your brothers, the workers of other countries, as is being done in the present war, and as the traitors to socialism are telling you to do. They need it to fight the bourgeoisie of their own country, to put an end to exploitation, poverty and war, and not by pious wishes, but by defeating and disarming the bourgeoisie"." (The military programme of the proletarian revolution, Lenin, 1916).

"The proletariat must not only oppose all such wars, but must also wish for the defeat of its 'own' government in such wars and utilise its defeat for revolutionary insurrection, if an insurrection to prevent the war proves unsuccessful." (The military programme of the proletarian revolution, Lenin, 1916).

"Our slogan must be: arming of the proletariat to defeat, expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie. (...) Only after the proletariat has disarmed the bourgeoisie will it be able, without betraying its world-historic mission, to consign all armaments to the scrap-heap. And the proletariat will undoubtedly do this, but only when this condition has been fulfilled, certainly not before." (The military programme of the proletarian revolution, Lenin, 1916).

1917 - Russian Revolution

The **patriotic and militaristic atmosphere** at the beginning of the war minimized the possibilities for the revolutionaries to act as they were stigmatized as responsible for the death of the soldiers because of their defeatist stance. This isolation persisted until the **constant return of uniformed sons in coffins** and the fatigue of the war effort imposed a change.

It took **three years from the beginning of the first imperialist world slaughter** to see a major insurrection in reaction to the war, the February revolution in Russia. It came between the **impulse of the masses to end the war** and the bourgeois currents in favor of the continuation of the war which organized the plot against the czar who was going to sign a separate peace with Germany (Lenin, Letters from Afar, 1917).

The Bolshevik Party, the **only party that had separated from opportunism long before**, pursued the tactic of revolutionary opposition to the Provisional Government (Lenin, April Theses, 1917), which led to the seizure of power in October 1917.

The October Revolution was a politically proletarian revolution because it entailed the **restoration of integral Marxism, the reorganization of the International, the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the outlawing of bourgeois parties.** It brought about the **end of the fratricidal massacre of the working class in Europe**, which was bleeding to death, and marked the **beginning of a communist revolutionary attempt throughout Europe and the world.**

The October Revolution is thus a **politically proletarian revolution**, but its economic task was the development of

capitalism in Russia, a task that **could only be overcome by integrating itself into a world process, with the extension of communist revolution to Europe and, in particular, to Germany** (Lenin, The Tax in Kind, 1921). The defeat of the revolution in Europe forced it to retreat into the second of its tasks: the construction of capitalism in Russia.

The **intervention of foreign armies and the formation of White armies** by former czarist military forces, and **also by Mensheviks and SRs**, greatly drained the energies of the Russian Revolution and, above all, **weighed heavily on the possibility of supporting the revolution in Europe**, of extending the attempt at world revolution initiated in Russia.

1918 - End of the First World War

The deeply **internationalist and anti-patriotic** stance of the Bolshevik revolution was embodied in the **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** in March 1918. Through the cession of a significant part of Russian territory, **the fratricidal slaughter among workers on the Eastern Front came to an end.**

In addition to **fraternization on the front**, German prisoners of war, treated fraternally by the Bolsheviks, were returned to Germany. Once the demagogic association of ideas was materially broken: *the Bolsheviks kill your sons*, **the doors opened for the extension of the revolution in Germany.**

Insurrections soon occurred in Germany, such as the **Kiel uprising** in November 1918, and **that same month of November 1918 marked the end of the first imperialist world slaughter.**

1918 - Foundation of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD)

It wasn't until a month after the end of the first imperialist world slaughter (**4 years after the bankruptcy of the Second International**) that the communists in Germany completely separated organizationally from opportunism. The Spartacus League became the Communist Party of Germany.

This **delayed organizational break from opportunism** is one of the main reasons why the revolutionary firestorm that followed in Europe after the end of the First World War could not culminate successfully.

The tremendous lesson is the **need to break with opportunism** – even in clear minority – **long before a potentially revolutionary situation arises.** Otherwise, when revolutionaries manage to establish the necessary organization – the Party – the first acts of the drama have already passed, and the opportunity has potentially been lost.

1919 - Social Democracy: Executioner of the Revolution

In the course of 1919 this lesson met with a series of tragic confirmations. In January 1919, just one month after the establishment of the Communist Party of Germany, its two main leaders **are murdered on the orders of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) by the Freikorps.** The **Soviet Republic of Hungary**, born in March, is **sabotaged from within by the social democrats and liquidated** in August 1919. The **Soviet Republic of Bavaria is defeated by the actions of the army of the Weimar Republic (governed by the SPD) and the Freikorps.** Social democracy not only assassinates communists in Europe but **Mensheviks and SRs organize White armies within Russia.**

The European bourgeoisie was waging a bloody battle to the

death against the nascent proletarian revolution and social democracy presented itself as its best agent.

1919 - Foundation of the 3rd International

With the **end of the first world war** and the **spread of the revolutionary firestorm in Europe**, the 3rd International was established in Moscow in March 1919.

In the course of only seven years after its birth in 1919, what should have been the world organization of the revolutionary proletariat and for a moment was so, went through the complete parabola from the initial tactical error to a real **tactical deviation** ('political united front', 1922), **tactical and programmatic deviation** ('workers government', 'workers and peasants government', 1922), **organizational deviation** ('Bolshevization', 1924) to end in a complete betrayal of communist principles with the **programmatic deviation** of 'socialism in one country' in 1926, which culminates the process of **degeneration** of the International. The lessons of the struggle of the Italian Communist Left against this degeneration are **indispensable material for the resumption of the revolutionary communist movement** for the overthrow of the bourgeois regime.

1920 – Kapp/Lüttwitz 'Putsch' and the Ruhr Uprising

To justify the KPD's support for the government, an attempt is made to compare the *putsch* of Kapp/Lüttwitz in March 1920 with the Kornilov episode during the Russian revolution. The comparison is unfounded because the **Kornilov episode represented a real possibility of feudal restoration** within the context of a double revolution while **the *putsch* of Kapp represented only a fraction of the bourgeoisie**, the ruling class already in power.

In reaction to the *putsch*, a series of **workers' uprisings in the Ruhr region** occur, which keep the state in check between March and April and were **harshly suppressed by the Army and the Freikorps under the leadership of the ruling SPD**.

This highlights the **tactical hesitations of the KPD** in supporting the government against the *putsch* when they should have launched an overthrow of the government as the only means to defeat the *putschists* as well.

1920 - Thesis of the Communist Abstentionist Faction of the PSI

A few months before the Second Congress of the Communist International (July 19th to August 7th, 1920), the Theses of the Abstentionist Communist Faction of the PSI (1920) were drafted at the conference of the Faction on May 8th and 9th in Florence.

These theses represent the *sole* international contribution that fully adhered to the guiding principles of the programmatic and tactical theses emerging from that congress. They serve as an example of what was expected from it: a text that would **firmly establish the principles and goals of the communist movement**, articulate the **critiques of the several ideological currents opposed to Marxism**, and define the **rules of action** for the party on a **worldwide and historical scale**.

In terms of formulation, these theses offer a clear **international platform for breaking with opportunism**, a **demarkation of revolutionary communist principles** from other currents, and they anticipate and satisfactorily resolve the problems that would undermine the path of the communist movement in the years to follow.

In its **first part**, the theses cover the **principles and goals**

of communism as enunciated in the Communist Party Manifesto, even using the same words, as the only basis for the formation of the Communist Party. They detail the stages of organizing the working class, up to the point of *"organization into a political party, which realizes the constitution of the proletariat as a class fighting for its emancipation"* (point 6), and unequivocally define the objective of the Communist Party's action: *"the violent destruction of bourgeois rule, the conquest of political power by the proletariat, the organization of the proletariat as the ruling class."* (point 7). Recognizing the complexities of the transformation process, it is clearly identified that the *"end of such a process is the complete realization: of the ownership and management of the means of production by the unified collective; of the central and rational distribution of productive forces in various branches of production; of central administration, by the collective, in the distribution of products."* (point 10), in other words, a non-commodity economy, and its corollary: *"the abolition of classes will be a fait accompli, and the State as a political instrument of power will have been progressively replaced by the rational collective administration of economic and social activity."* (point 11).

In the **second part, a critique of various clearly bourgeois schools of thought** is presented: philosophical idealism (point 2), bourgeois liberalism and democracy (point 3), reformism, educationalism, and gradualism (point 4), nationalism and patriotism (point 5), pacifism (point 6), utopianism (point 7); **or allegedly worker schools of thought**: cooperativism (point 9), self-management and corporatist or 'revolutionary' unionism, which considers the union as a sufficient organ for revolution (point 10, although without neglecting the importance of union action as a necessary field of initial proletarian experience), councilism and co-management or any form of 'worker control' before seizing power, including Gramsci's Ordinovism (point 11), nationalization or municipalization (point 12), and parliamentarism (points 13, 14, and 15), syndicalist corporatism, fascist corporatism or Dannunzianism (point 16), and finally, the correct identification of anarchism as a conserver of capitalism on the economic plane and as defeatist of the revolution on the political plane (point 17).

The **third part** introduces the **system of tactical rules**: it rejects both fatalism and voluntarism (point 1), the Party is conceived not as a national but as an international one (point 2), and correctly anticipates the necessary influence of the Party on broad masses to embark on action, without falling into ambiguous formulations of an arithmetic or democratic nature: *"the criterion for the advisability of revolutionary actions is the objective evaluation of one's own strengths and those of the adversary, in all their complex coefficients, where the number is neither the only nor the most important factor."* (point 3). It is crucial to define the conditions of action for communists in organs exclusively constituted by proletarians (point 5), to reject entry into any institution or association *"in which proletarians and bourgeoisie participate on equal terms."* (point 6). The rejection of parliamentary tactics (point 7) and its municipalist variant (point 8) is emphasized, reaffirming the need to disseminate the revolutionary goal (point 9), taking propaganda to the ranks of the army as well (point 10), and preparing a network of information and weaponry to prepare the Party to act as the general staff of the proletariat (point 11). Finally, it condemns the political united front tactic, even with currents that accept insurrectionary action *"but differ from the communist program in the development of subsequent action."* (point 12), establishes the precise relationship between the

soviets and the Party (point 13), and concludes with a clear distancing from what would be called the 'offensive tactic,' defining as the specific task of the Party *"to combat both those who, by pushing for revolutionary action at all costs, might lead the proletariat to disaster, and opportunists who take advantage of circumstances that discourage thoroughgoing action, creating definitive stops in the revolutionary movement, diverting the action of the masses, which, on the contrary, the communist party must increasingly lead toward the terrain of effective preparation for the inexorable armed struggle against the bulwarks of the bourgeois principle."* (point 14).

1920 - 2nd Congress of the 3rd International

Convened in July-August 1920, the 2nd Congress is considered the true founding congress of the International. The **theoretical-tactical questions are addressed within the framework of Marxism** in the Theses of the 2nd Congress, although it is noted that *"Perhaps it would have been better if the congress, instead of following the arrangement of arguments that it did in the various theses, all of them theoretical-tactical, had established the fundamental bases of the communist theoretical-programmatic conception, upon whose acceptance the organization of all adhering parties should first be founded; and, consequently, the fundamental rules of action regarding the labor, agrarian, colonial problems, etc., in whose disciplined observance all adherents are committed."* (Party and Class Action, 1921).

It approved the **admission conditions**, in which the representative of the Communist Abstentionist Faction at the Congress played a prominent role. Their general meaning is clear and summarized in condition 21st: ***"Adherents to the party who reject the conditions and the theses established by the Communist International must be excluded from the party. The same will apply to delegates to the extraordinary congress."*** The representative of the Italian Left argued in Moscow that: *"In debates or discussions about the program, there is no discipline. Either you accept it or you don't; and in the latter case, you leave the party. The program is something common for everyone; it is not a proposal by the majority of comrades."*

However, despite the efforts of the Left, the final wording of these admission conditions included a series of exceptions (the **'special conditions of their country'** in the elaboration of the program in condition 15th, the *where possible* of the 16th, and the exceptions of the 20th), which were configured as so many **backdoors for the entry of opportunism**.

In this same II Congress the **Theses on the national and colonial question** were also approved. In them were included the tactics to be followed by the communists and their parties in the countries where the anti-feudal and/or anti-colonial revolution was still pending. One can observe in the development of the Communist Party of China (founded in 1921, subjected to the Kuomintang in 1922) the **dire consequences of transgressing the limits of such tactics** and, in particular, the consequences of sacrificing the complete organizational autonomy of the communist organization.

It must be remembered that in the II Congress the participation of non-Marxist currents such as the anarcho-syndicalist A. Pestaña, delegate of the Spanish CNT, was erroneously allowed.

Regarding the **tactical discrepancy** concerning the tactics of **revolutionary parliamentarism** in relation to the tactics of **revolutionary abstentionism**, it is necessary to recall some basic points:

- There is **no theoretical-programmatic discrepancy** between the Bolsheviks and the Left: **the bourgeois parliament must be overthrown and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat**. The theses of the International itself envision boycotting the parliament, and the Bolsheviks boycotted the parliament on several occasions.
- On the contrary, **those who cling and still cling today to the title of Bolshevik tactics are actually in favor of defending the bourgeois parliament** and do not defend or conceive its overthrow and replacement by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Beneath the apparent agreement of these currents with the tactical title, there always hides a fundamental theoretical-programmatic divergence from the Bolshevik approach.
- The Left always maintained that the divergence was tactical, giving precedence to the need for international centralism over abstentionism, expecting the correction of tactics at the international level through experience, rejecting obtaining it through deceitful *"special conditions"*, wheeling and dealing, or organizational subterfuge: ***"the abstentionism we try to pass through the door should not enter through the window."*** (Elections, 1921).
- The Left did not base its abstentionism on the *difficulties* of the tactic proposed by the Bolsheviks but on the conviction that **this tactic would lead communist parties down the path of social democratic parties, and that it would provide shelter for all those who rejected the violent revolution**, accepting it only in words.
- One hundred years later, we can assert without a doubt that history has shown that **the tactical error of revolutionary parliamentarism in mature capitalism** not only did not blow up any bourgeois parliaments but was part of the mechanism of straitjacket emerging communist parties within the confines of the bourgeois parliament.

1920 - Defeat of the Red Army at the Gates of Warsaw

When the Red Army managed to gain sufficient control over the situation within Russia, it arrived **too late to support the uprisings that had occurred in Europe** (January 1919 and early 1920). The defeat of the Red Army at the gates of Warsaw in August 1920 marked a **turning point in the revolutionary potential in Europe and the beginning of its ebb**.

(The publication of this series, which we began in "The Internationalist Proletarian" n. 12 as a result of the collective study work of the general meeting of August 2023, will continue in the following issues of the review).